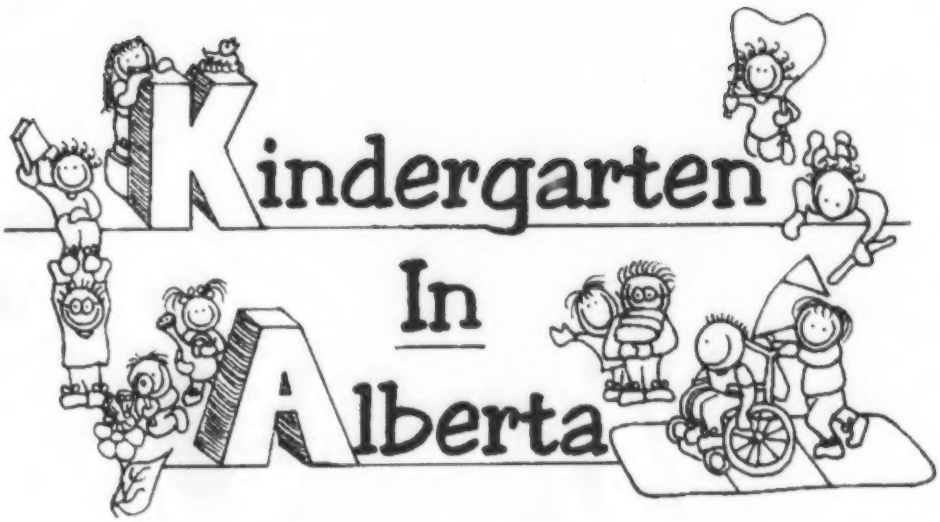

A Handbook For Parents

Catholic School Version

2001–2002

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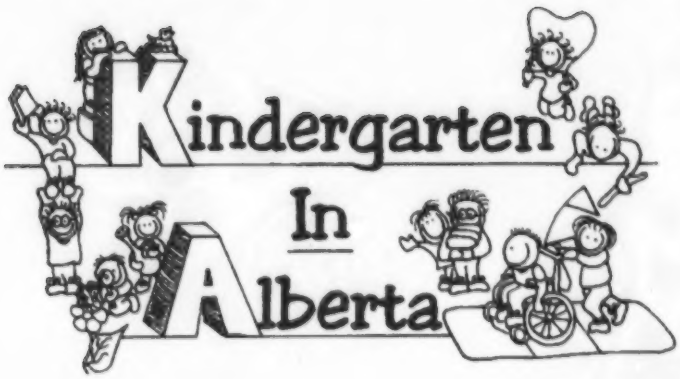

A Handbook For Parents

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Kindergarten in Alberta

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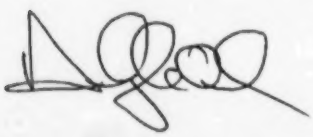
Message from the
Minister of Learning

Kindergarten marks a new beginning for you and your child. It is a time for new discoveries and challenges; as your child makes the transition from home to school and as you meet and work with the people who are partners in your child's education.

While students are at the centre of the education system, parents are vital partners. Your involvement in your child's education is critical to his or her success. However, to help your child succeed—you need to know what is being taught. *Kindergarten in Alberta: A Handbook for Parents* provides a clear, concise description of what you can expect of your child's kindergarten program. This handbook describes how young children learn, how learning is assessed and how you can be involved. It is important to remember that each child is different—children will learn and achieve at different rates in different areas.

I believe that education is a fundamental part of the Alberta Advantage, and my goal is for Alberta to have the best-educated students in the world. We can accomplish this only one way—by working *together*. We are all partners in education—parents, teachers, trustees, administrators, community members—and we must work to address issues and help ensure Alberta students acquire the knowledge and skills they need for a successful future.

Our children are our future, and our most important investment.



Dr. Lyle Oberg
M.L.A. Strathmore-Brooks
Minister of Learning

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Dear Parents and Guardians:

On behalf of the Catholic Bishops of Alberta, I welcome this opportunity to affirm you in your role as parents in the education of your children and wish to express my appreciation to the Government of Alberta and Alberta Learning for this 'Curriculum Handbook for Parents'.

The Church has always recognized with confidence that you, parents, are the first and primary educators of your children, especially with regards to education in the faith. This is a noble, yet, challenging calling that is rightfully yours. Today, therefore, because of the many diverse pressures and influences on our children, your role is vital in working with our schools to continue to provide the best possible education for our children. To those of you who have entrusted your children to a Catholic school be assured that it is with great respect for these facts that we support you in your role. I encourage you to work closely with our Catholic schools by joining your local school councils or parent groups. Be a strong voice for the catholic identity of schools. In this regard, you will share in a concrete and invaluable way in the central mission of the Church which is to proclaim Jesus and his Gospel in the world today and, in so doing, hand on our faith to our children.

I commend Alberta Learning for providing parents with this practical Curriculum Handbook. It is a clear presentation of what parents can expect of our Alberta schools, Public and Catholic, and by its very existence also acknowledges how important you are as parents in your children's education. In it, you will find a comprehensive presentation of the content and expectations of the Religious Education Program approved by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. It reflects the essential character of Catholic schools as communities of learning.

+ Thomas Collins

Thomas Collins
Archbishop of Edmonton
President, Alberta Conference of Catholic Bishops

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Welcome to Kindergarten . . .

Entering Kindergarten is an exciting time for every child. Moving from the home environment to the school environment is a rite of passage. Both parents and teachers want this transition to be as smooth as possible.

The teacher welcomes the children into the program and gently introduces them to the Kindergarten environment. Orientations help everyone feel at ease. The children are given time to become acquainted with each other and with classroom activities and materials. Gradually, children gain a sense of belonging because they know the routines and school layout.

There are many new adult faces at Kindergarten! Children may meet and talk with the principal, custodians, secretaries, librarians, teacher assistants, community nurses, dental hygienists, teachers of other grades, community volunteers and other children's parents. Social development is enhanced through this broad interaction with adults and children in the school.

In a Catholic school, the spiritual development of the child is nourished and the child will likely meet the priest, pastoral assistants and other members of the parish.

In some Kindergarten programs, a teacher assistant helps with and supports the delivery of the program. In special needs or language programs, the assistant has a more specialized role.

All schools make the safety of every child a top priority. Because Kindergarten children are new to the school environment, extra care is taken to ensure their safety. If Kindergarten children participate in school recess, teachers help them until they become independent. Children are supervised during each recess, and safe play is encouraged. Recess provides a good opportunity for Kindergarten children to learn to be with children of different ages.

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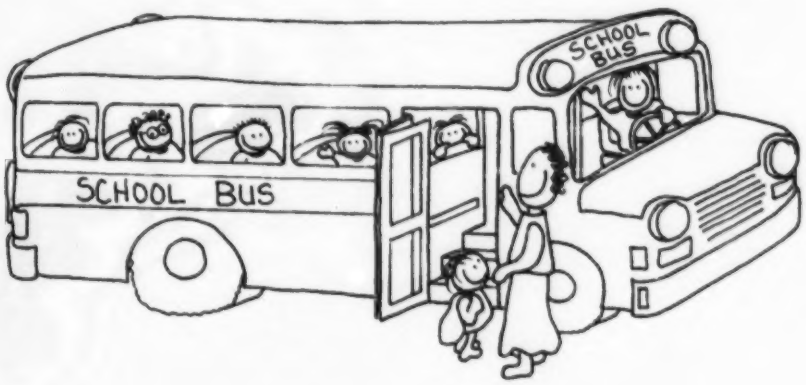
The school keeps parents informed about arrival and departure procedures. In turn, parents should advise the school of special circumstances or changes in regular routines. School staff ensure that the children are safe as they get on and off school buses.



hat is Kindergarten in Alberta?

In Alberta, parents decide if their child will participate in Kindergarten or other programs provided for children who are under 6 years of age, as of September 1. Most children enter the Kindergarten program one year before entry into Grade 1. The local school board sets the policies for age of entry into Grade 1. Children with special needs may be enrolled in an Early Childhood Services (ECS) program at an earlier age.

The terms Kindergarten and Early Childhood Services are often used interchangeably. However, "Kindergarten" refers specifically to the education program for children, and "Early Childhood Services" refers to the broad, coordinated system of local and provincial programs that meet the developmental and special needs of young children and their families. The Kindergarten program is an important part of Early Childhood Services.

The Kindergarten program in Alberta is based on the following beliefs relating to young children, their learning, and their home and community environments.

- Children develop through similar stages but at individual rates. The Kindergarten program provides learning experiences that meet individual and group needs, interests and developmental levels. Additional support is provided to children with special needs to help them increase their potential for learning.

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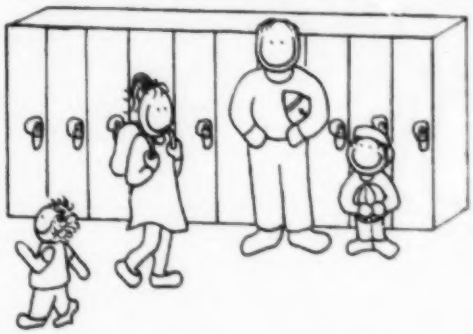
- Young children are naturally curious and eager to learn. They benefit from developing positive relationships with others, including children of their own age. The Kindergarten program provides opportunities for children to learn about their environment through organized activities, purposeful play and cooperation with others.
- Parents are their children's first and most important teachers and play a central role in the lives of their children. The program supports and respects the dignity and worth of the family and encourages parents to participate in their children's education.
- The Kindergarten program plays a role in the coordination of community services for young children and their families.



Kindergarten programs are operated either by a school board, in a similar way to programs for Grade 1 to Grade 12, or by an ECS private operator. A private operator is a nonprofit society with an elected board of parents and community members.

Children enter Kindergarten in a variety of settings in Alberta, including schools, community facilities and day care centres. Some Kindergarten classes are totally separate from other classes, others are part of an elementary school, Kindergarten to Grade 6, and a few are members of a whole school community from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

What are young children like?

Young children are developing socially, physically, intellectually, creatively, emotionally and spiritually. All these areas are related to and dependent on one another. Early childhood is a time of rapid intellectual growth and development. The development of the intellect is influenced by social, physical, creative and emotional growth. In a Catholic school, it is recognized that young children are each at a unique place in their spiritual development.

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The Kindergarten program provides learning experiences that meet the developmental needs of all children. Children move through similar stages, but with their own pattern and at their own rate of development and learning. When children enter the Kindergarten program, there may be as much as a year's difference in age between the oldest and the youngest—one-fifth of their lifetime!

The following descriptions of developmental characteristics are typical of most, but not all, children in Kindergarten.

Social Development

Kindergarten children are becoming more socially oriented and are making friends with children of their own age, although these friendships may change frequently. They are learning to share, cooperate and play in groups. They are increasing their awareness of a variety of social behaviours and situations, such as being friends, taking turns, being fair and having conflicts. Adults, especially family, are still very important; their support and approval helps children adjust to unfamiliar situations.

Physical Development

Kindergarten children are moving into a time of slower growth after the rapid growth of the early years. They have better control of their large muscles than of their small muscles, and continue to develop abilities, such as running, hopping, climbing, balancing and jumping. They may have some difficulty with small materials, such as writing tools, scissors and shoelaces. They are increasing their ability to control and coordinate movements, such as throwing, kicking and catching a ball. They are learning to use all of their senses, but their vision and hearing are not yet fully developed.

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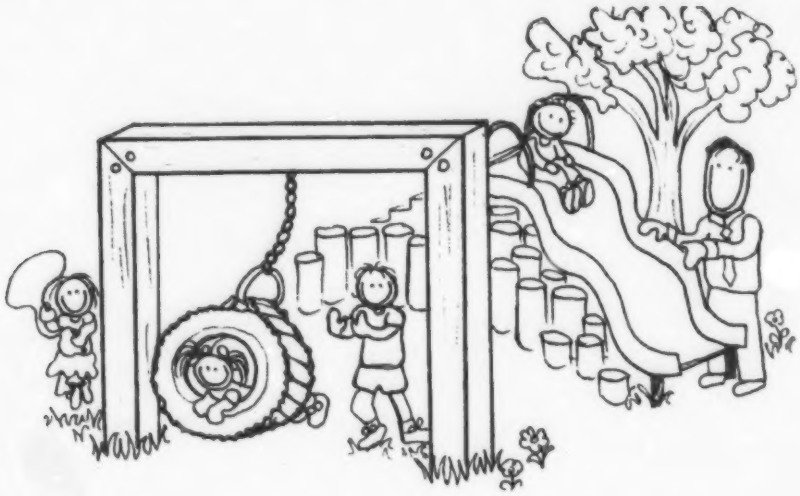
Children of this age are full of energy. They tire easily, but recover quickly. Sitting still for long periods of time is difficult, so they need a balance of active and quiet times.



Intellectual Development

Kindergarten children are gaining knowledge of objects, relationships and events in their immediate experience by doing, observing, imitating and exploring. They are developing fundamental thinking skills related to their direct experiences, but their reasoning, memory and problem-solving skills are still limited. They are beginning to plan and think ahead, but often think and act in the here-and-now. They still view things mainly from their own perspective, but are becoming more able to understand the views of others. They are developing the ability to pay attention for longer periods of time, and their memory is increasing.

Young children's hearing and speaking vocabularies increase rapidly, and they love to talk. They develop their ability to stay on topic, take turns and tell stories. They ask many questions about the world around them. They experiment with the sounds of language and begin to express their ideas in pictures and writing. They develop a "sense of story" through listening, reading and viewing.

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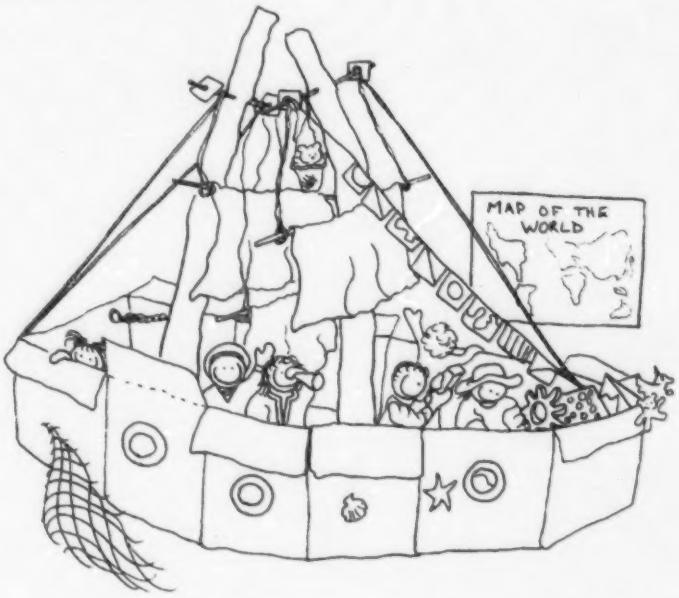
Creative Development

Kindergarten children want to express their personal ideas and feelings, and they need people to listen and respond to them. They explore, experiment and create, using a variety of materials. Their work becomes more detailed, and they talk about what they have created. They often take part—spontaneously and imaginatively—in music, dancing and movement. In dramatic play, young children experiment with different roles and discover new solutions to problems. The process of creating is often more important to them than the end product.



Emotional Development

Emotional development includes experiencing and expressing feelings, and developing independence, decision-making skills and initiative.

Kindergarten children display their emotions easily, intensely and visibly. They are developing the ability to understand and differentiate between their own emotions and those of others. They are learning socially appropriate ways to express their emotions. They want to do things themselves to demonstrate their growing confidence and independence. They are ready to take on more responsibilities and are developing a sense of self—a feeling of being different from others. They may also express fears and show anxiety when separated from familiar people, places and things.

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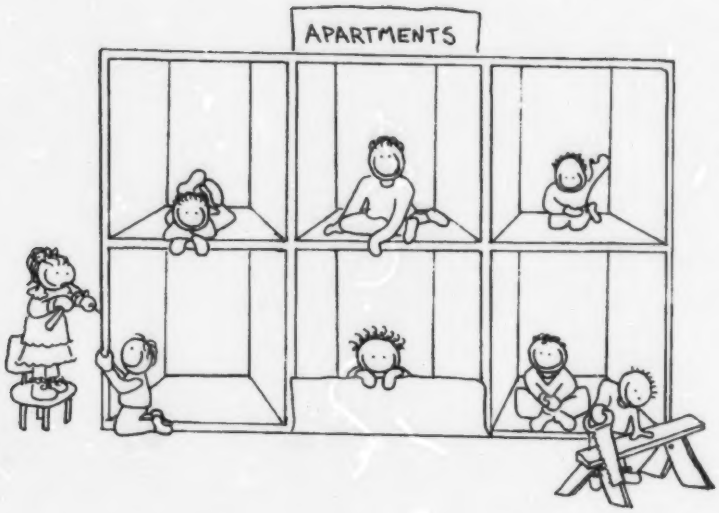

Spiritual Development

A young child's way of being "religious" is to play, to be creative, to be curious, and to express wonderment. Through these natural childhood activities children explore traces of God, the "marks" of God present all around them as they grow, learn and experience life. The essence of children's spirituality is their response to life.

In the uninhibited excitement that Kindergarten children feel toward nature, they are drawn toward a loving Creator. Their experiences of God are "sensed" through touching, smelling, tasting, seeing and hearing, rather than through intellectual explanations.

Young children come to know Jesus through their experiences of seeing people valued and celebrated. They recognize themselves first, and then their families, friends and classmates as made in God's image. Later, they are able to experience Jesus as the perfect image and likeness of God.

In a Catholic school, the spiritual development of a child in Kindergarten occurs through activities that are affective, to support positive feelings toward themselves and others; and sensory, to relate directly to the good things that God has created.

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What do children learn in Kindergarten?

Early childhood is a significant period in human development. It is the time when children begin to develop independence, initiative, decision-making ability, creativity, early literacy and numeracy skills, the ability to learn, the ability to relate to others, verbal communication skills, and feelings of self-worth! What young children learn at this stage will have a major impact on successful learning experiences in school, on personal development and on future participation in society.

Young children begin all this important learning in a variety of environments—in their homes, in day care programs and in the community. Children arrive in Kindergarten from diverse backgrounds and with a variety of experiences.

In a Catholic school, children are affirmed and encouraged as they make their own journey toward God and greater participation in the Church.

Religious education crosses all the six learning areas described in the *Kindergarten Program Statement.*

Religious Education

The Kindergarten religion program, "In God's Image," consists of 8 modules containing 33 themes that can be sequenced by the teacher to best respond to the particular needs and interests of each class.

The "Me" module celebrates the child through such topics as feelings, senses, capabilities, needs and family. The "Earth Times" module celebrates the wonder of the earth through activities related to the seasons. The "Community" module celebrates caring through discussion, by making friends and by helping. The "Changes" module invites children to experience support and comfort at such times as the birth of a sibling or moving to a new house. The "Plants" and "Animals" modules celebrate creation through activities with trees, flowers, bugs, pets and other animals. The "Special Days" module suggests activities for celebrating such events as birthdays, Mother's Day and Father's Day. The "Church Times" module is a sequential set of lessons that invite children to celebrate the Christian story as it unfolds through Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter.

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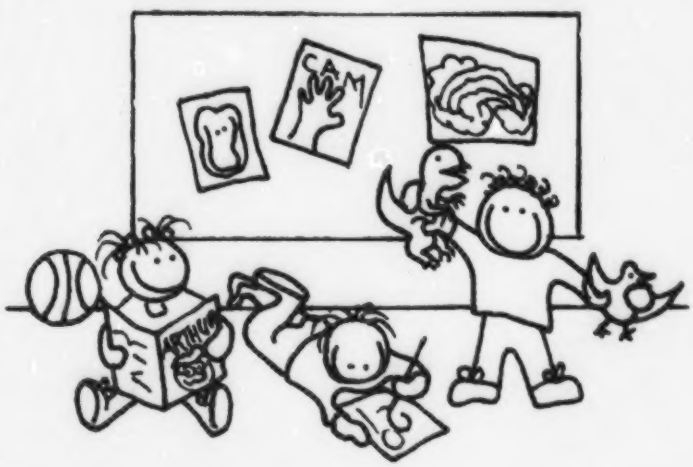
"In God's Image" uses the existing special moments and experiences of young children and affirms their religious importance. Throughout the day, the children are encouraged to see "traces" of God in all of their experiences.

The *Kindergarten Program Statement*, developed by Alberta Learning with advice and assistance from early childhood educators, describes what young children need to learn to prepare for entry into Grade 1 and to provide a foundation for later success. Children accomplish these learnings not only in the Kindergarten program, but also in their homes and community.

The *Kindergarten Program Statement* describes clear expectations in six learning areas:

- English Language Arts
- Mathematics
- Community and Environmental Awareness
- Personal and Social Responsibility
- Physical Skills and Well-being
- Creative and Cultural Expression.

The learning areas focus on the early learnings in English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, physical education, health and the fine arts, and provide a transition to the subject area expectations of elementary schooling.



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English Language Arts

Language is the basis of all communication. Language learning is an active process that begins at birth and continues throughout life. Children learn language as they use it to communicate their thoughts, feelings and experiences; establish relationships with family members and friends; and strive to make sense and order of their world.

In Kindergarten, children participate in shared listening, reading and viewing experiences using such texts as picture books, fairy tales, rhymes, stories, photographs, illustrations and video programs. They share stories using rhymes, rhythms, symbols, pictures and drama to celebrate individual and class accomplishments. Children draw, record and tell about their own ideas and experiences and participate in class and group language activities.

Children begin to use language prediction skills when stories are read aloud and to ask questions and make comments during listening, viewing and reading activities. They read their own names, as well as some words that have personal significance. Children categorize objects and pictures, and represent and share ideas and information about topics of interest. They form recognizable letters, print their own names, and explore and experiment with new words and terms.

Mathematics

Mathematics is a common human activity, increasing in importance in a rapidly advancing, technological society. Children need to become mathematically literate in order to explore problem-solving situations.

In Kindergarten children explore number, patterns, shape and space and data analysis by working with appropriate materials, tools and contexts. They count and compare objects, and demonstrate awareness of addition and subtraction through role playing and manipulatives. They identify and create patterns and learn about measurement by classifying, matching, describing and comparing familiar materials. Children describe, sort and build real-world objects, and learn to collect and organize information related to their world.

Children began to develop problem-solving skills that they will continue to expand and refine throughout their schooling.

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Community and Environmental Awareness

Children explore, investigate and describe their environment and community by asking questions, solving problems and using their senses. They identify familiar shapes, symbols and sounds, and recognize similarities and differences in living things, objects and materials. They begin to acquire information from selected sources and generate ideas to make personal sense of the environment.

Children explore the design, function and properties of a variety of natural and manufactured materials. Using simple tools in a safe and appropriate manner, they select and work with a variety of materials to build structures. They explore scientific and aesthetic concepts, using sand, water, blocks, clay and other materials, and begin to use some technology appropriately.

Children become aware of diversity in the uniqueness of self and others by describing feelings, special interests, events and experiences shared with family and friends. They begin to acknowledge and express personal feelings and emotions, as well as appreciating the strengths and gifts of self and others. They learn about homes, family life, familiar places, and people who work and help in the community. They role play familiar home and community situations and activities. Children recognize seasonal changes, colours and shapes in the environment, and familiar animals in their surroundings.

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ersonal and Social Responsibility

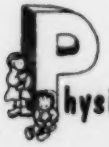
This learning area focuses on the personal and social skills that are necessary for effective learning across all subject areas.

It takes time to develop personal and social skills. This development occurs at different rates as a result of each child's experiences. In the Kindergarten program, children begin to develop and practise skills that they will continue to enhance throughout their lives.

By participating actively in learning tasks, trying new things and taking risks, children begin to see themselves as capable of learning. Children of this age are curious and are learning to adapt to new situations. They begin to accept rules and deal with routines in a school environment. They become more independent and learn to take some responsibility for selecting and completing learning activities.

Kindergarten helps children learn how to work and play with others. Most children are not used to being in a room with many other children of the same age and sharing the attention of only one or two adults. This requires the development of many social skills. In Kindergarten, children learn much about friendship, cooperation and appropriate behaviour.

Children need to learn to express their feelings in socially acceptable ways and show respect and a positive caring attitude toward others. They do so by taking turns in activities and discussions, working cooperatively, giving and receiving help, and taking part in small and large group activities.



hysical Skills and Well-being

Physical activity is vital to all aspects of normal growth and development. Early childhood is the time to begin the development of active, healthy lifestyles. Children need assistance to develop the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to continual involvement in physical activity.

Health and life skills involve learning about the habits, behaviours, interactions and decisions related to healthy daily living and well-being. In Kindergarten, children begin to develop personal responsibility for health and learn about personal safety and ways to prevent and reduce risk.

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Through movement, games and activities, using such equipment as balls, bean bags and hoops, children develop coordinated movement, balance and stability. Their fine motor skills also improve. They learn to hold a writing implement and control its movements. Eye–hand coordination increases as children work with small materials, such as buttons, cubes, blocks and beads.

By participating in physical activities, by becoming aware of healthy food choices and by learning to observe safety rules, children develop attitudes and practise behaviours that promote wellness and an active, healthy lifestyle.

Creative and Cultural Expression

Children explore and express their thoughts and feelings through visual arts, music, drama and movement. They become aware of their own imagination and creativity and that of others as they learn how ideas and feelings are communicated in many ways.

By viewing and responding to natural forms, everyday objects and artworks children begin to learn about how we see and interpret visual images. Children express themselves through movement and individual and group musical activities, songs and games. They listen to and begin to appreciate a variety of musical instruments and different kinds of music. Through dramatic play and movement, children grow in self-awareness and self-confidence and develop their imaginative and creative thought.

Children explore a variety of ways to pose and solve problems, using past experiences to develop new ideas. They begin to connect their own experiences with forms of artistic expression in the world around them.

Children begin to recognize diverse family and cultural traditions and the contributions the arts make to these traditions. They share some family traditions and celebrations and recognize that people celebrate special occasions in a variety of ways.

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How do young children learn?

Young children see the world differently than older students and adults, and they learn best through direct, sensory experience. They need to manipulate, explore and experiment with real objects. They learn by doing, moving and talking.

Young children are naturally curious and eager to learn. They are active learners who learn through a variety of means. Purposeful play is an important way that children learn. Educators and psychologists refer to play as the serious work of childhood. Children at play are highly motivated and capable of intense concentration.

As children play, they are clarifying information, integrating ideas from previous experiences, and exploring and experimenting with their environment. Play gives children opportunities to add to their knowledge, learn new skills and practise familiar ones. Through play, children learn to deal with their feelings, interact with others and resolve conflicts. They develop their imagination, creativity and ability to solve problems.

Play is a valuable and important way for children to learn. It provides the opportunity for active learning and for children to master skills that will be used later in more formal study.

In a Catholic school, children play their way into God's world. They experience God through group and individual activity centres, games, prayer, art, singing, puppets, finger plays, stories and celebrating.

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hat will you see in the Kindergarten area?

When visitors walk down the school hallway, they can usually recognize the Kindergarten area by the way it looks and sounds: bright, cheerful, colourful and busy.

Each Kindergarten program features a variety of spaces for independent and small or large group activities. As most children need to be active, there will be a variety of work spaces. The Kindergarten will have learning centres of many types, such as:

- art – with painting and drawing materials for children to explore and express their feelings
- construction – with blocks, manipulative toys and woodworking tools for children to design, create and build
- cooking – with snacks and special foods for children to prepare and share
- dramatic play – with props for a house or store, puppets and dress-up clothes for children to enjoy imaginative play
- games – with puzzles and table games for children to share, think and problem solve
- library and listening – with a variety of books and tapes for children to read and listen to
- mathematics – with manipulative materials and tasks for children to sort, count, classify, measure and learn number sense
- music – with instruments and materials for children to express their feelings and listen to a variety of music
- sand and water – with cups, spoons and funnels for children to measure and solve problems
- science and exploration – with such materials as seeds, plants and rocks for children to observe and investigate
- writing – with paper, pencils, markers, crayons and possibly a computer for children to express their thoughts and ideas
- large motor skills – with an indoor or outdoor area for children to play games and develop physical skills.

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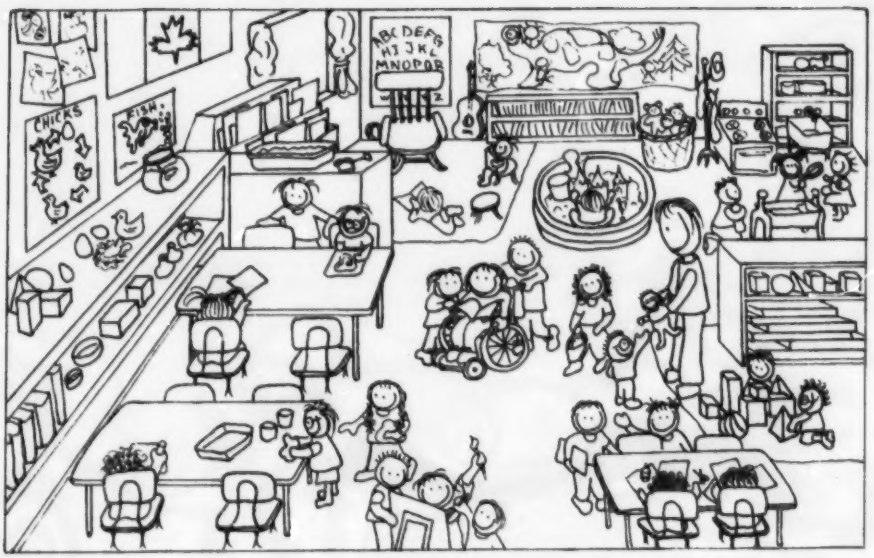

In a Catholic school, the Kindergarten classroom will have a prayer centre where the Bible has a special place of honour. A cross, candles and special cloth may also be present. The teacher will use this centre as a gathering area to commence religious activities and will allow the children to explore the Bible and other elements of the centre freely. In addition, the teacher may adjust the art, nature, games, or other centres previously mentioned, to reflect the current emphasis of the religion program.

Learning centres give children the opportunity to explore and discover, and take responsibility for selecting and completing a variety of activities. Some learning centres may be available all year. Others are introduced for special projects, interests or at seasonal times. The teacher organizes the work spaces, activities and materials in response to the children's diverse needs, interests and activities, while taking into account the expectations of the *Kindergarten Program Statement*. For example, the playhouse centre can be a castle for kings and queens for a week, and then become a hospital for doctors and nurses. The water centre can be changed with the addition of bubbles, ice, boats, corks or whales.

The Kindergarten classroom is an ever-changing and dynamic learning environment. Children gather together as a whole class to listen to stories, sing songs or share and discuss ideas. A child may choose to do a quiet activity alone, such as watching fish in the aquarium or working on a puzzle. Most of the time, children will be joining others to talk, listen, work and play together. One child may spend an hour doing one task while another child is involved in three or four activities during that hour.

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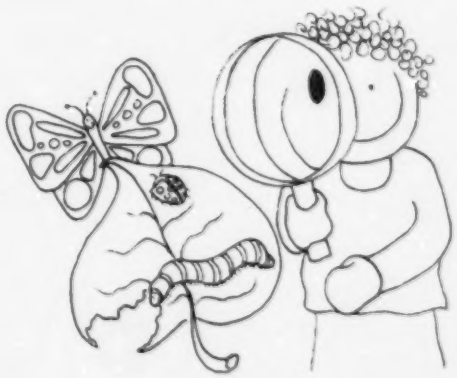
The teacher, and other adults in the classroom, support learning by being actively involved with the children. For example, an adult may help one child to make a sign, or cut out a special shape from heavy cardboard for another. A parent volunteer explains to a small group what happens when a snake sheds its skin. Two children have trouble sharing and the teacher helps them talk it through.

The class often explores a topic of study that arises out of children's interests and brings together learning from different areas.



For example, suppose that a child notices an ant crawling across the floor during story time and watches it closely, perhaps even interrupting the teacher to announce the discovery. Other children hover over the ant to examine and talk about it and to share personal experiences.

If the children demonstrate a strong interest, the teacher may read them a book about ants. The children may decide to learn how to write "ant" in their journals. The teacher may teach the song *The Ants Go Marching One By One*, and ask the children to look for ants near their own homes. Several children may bring ants to school in glass jars to show their classmates. Other children may bring in beetles, spiders or caterpillars, and then the study of insects and bugs begins to emerge.

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As they study a topic, such as insects, the children cover all six of the learning areas included in the *Kindergarten Program Statement*:

- English language arts—stories and poems about bugs
- mathematics—counting legs, sorting bugs
- community and environmental awareness—identifying and classifying bugs, pond studies, listening to guest speakers or visiting facilities
- personal and social responsibility—demonstrating curiosity, self-directed study through observation, working cooperatively
- physical skills and well-being—developing fine motor skills in order to catch bugs, recognizing that some bugs may be harmful
- creative and cultural expression—making models of bugs, singing action songs.

In the Kindergarten classroom, children are often invited to share their accomplishments and projects. One day, it may be a town made out of blocks. Another day, it may be a painting that started out with an exploration of the colour yellow.

Sometimes the children will try to perfect some of their work—it may be a song for a spring concert, paintings and sculptures for an art show, or gifts for Mom or Dad. Although this requires much concentration and hard work for young children, the appreciation they receive and their sense of accomplishment make the effort worthwhile.

Many people from the community contribute to the Kindergarten program. Over the year, visitors may come to the class to expand upon topics of interest. At other times, the children may supplement their classroom learning by going on field trips to places within the community. These activities, along with family functions and special celebrations, help children build an understanding of the world around them. Of course, parents are encouraged to participate in this special first year!

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How and why is children's learning assessed in Kindergarten?

Assessment is a natural, ongoing and important part of daily learning. By questioning and talking to children, listening to the language they use and observing their behaviour, adults gain information about children's levels of skill and understanding.

Throughout the Kindergarten year, the teacher will observe and record children's learning and progress in relation to the expectations for the six learning areas included in the *Kindergarten Program Statement*.

The teacher keeps notes and uses checklists to record observations. The teacher looks not only at the children's work but also at the skills and strategies that children use. By observing children many times in different situations the teacher is better able to build a more complete assessment of their learning.

Portfolios of children's work selected by children and the teacher may be compiled over the year. A portfolio, containing such items as artwork, journals, samples of work, tape recordings or photographs, provides a meaningful picture of the child's progress throughout the year.

Children demonstrate their learning in appropriate and practical ways in an encouraging and supportive environment. They show their disposition for learning through their curiosity and persistence in learning activities, their ability to adapt to new situations, and their contribution to group activities.

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Information that the teacher gathers about each child is used in several ways. This information helps the teacher plan the learning environment and match learning activities to learning needs. The teacher is able to provide ongoing feedback to children to help them recognize what they know and are able to do, and to focus their efforts on more challenging activities.

Through oral or written reports, parent evenings, classroom visits and conferences, teachers and parents can exchange ideas and information, and parents can learn more about their children's progress and achievements. In some Kindergarten programs, the child participates in conferences with the parents and teacher. This experience allows children to reflect on and celebrate their learning and set future goals.

Some children have special needs. How will the Kindergarten program meet these needs?

The Kindergarten program is based on the belief that all children can learn. In the Kindergarten room, children with a variety of needs and skill levels work and learn together. The teacher ensures that all children are included in activities that help them build on their own level of learning.

Some young children have special intellectual, emotional, sensory, physical and communication needs that affect their learning. Others experience situations that influence their learning, such as frequent changes of residence or lack of fluency in the language of instruction.

School boards and private operators are responsible for meeting the special needs of their ECS children.

Children with special needs are identified so that they and their families may receive appropriate services and support. For example, children identified as having mild, moderate or severe needs may enter an ECS program at a younger age to access early intervention services. Some children will need special supports or adaptations, such as personal help or large print books. These approaches allow children to increase their potential for learning and to make the most of learning opportunities.

In the Catholic school all children, including those with special needs, are valued as unique members of God's family.

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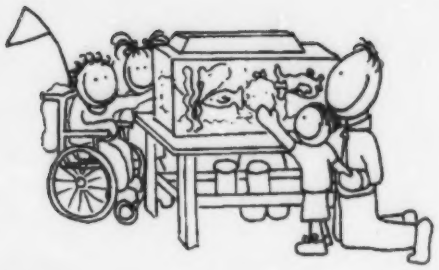

Schools may provide information to parents about available community services to assist them in meeting the needs of their children. Community services may include health, social and family support agencies; recreational and cultural associations; and a wide variety of other groups that work with children in the community. Coordination of services supports the integrated learning needs of children.

There is a wide range in children's abilities and development throughout the Kindergarten year. Parents who are concerned about their child's learning needs should contact the teacher.

An information booklet for parents of children with special needs, *Partners During Changing Times*, provides a general overview of how parents can become involved in the education of their children. This document is available on the Alberta Learning web site, or by contacting the Special Programs Branch. An additional resource, *The Parent Advantage*, provides tips and strategies to assist parents in helping their children at home with their schoolwork. This resource is available for purchase from the Learning Resources Centre.

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How will the Kindergarten program help prepare children for Grade 1?

The Kindergarten experience enhances children's personal development and gives them a growing sense of responsibility. The program teaches them how to try new things with confidence, creativity and a "can do" attitude. Children's endurance and stamina builds gradually over the year.

Parents across Alberta have noticed how Kindergarten gives their children a strong disposition for learning in a school environment. Children become familiar with the expectations of teachers and are motivated and focused to take on new challenges.

Most children leave the Kindergarten program after one year, ready to move on to Grade 1. In some cases, though, a child needs more time before going on to a full-time, Grade 1 class. This is a decision that parents and teachers make together.

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In a Catholic school, the affective and sensory religious experiences the children enjoy in Kindergarten are the foundation of their continuing spiritual journey. After Kindergarten, the children are ready to build on their everyday faith experiences as they learn more explicitly in Grade 1 that God loves each of us unconditionally.

How can parents be involved?

Parents play a central role in the lives of their children and are responsible for meeting their children's physical, social and emotional needs. Parents are their children's first teachers, and family influences are lifelong.

When children begin Kindergarten, parents and teachers enter into a partnership to support children's learning. For the well-being of their children, parents are encouraged to become involved in the Kindergarten experience, to the degree that both teacher and parent feel is appropriate. Parents can share expertise and skills with the class, help organize activities or school/family functions, assist on field trips, prepare materials at home, and give ideas or input to the program.

Communication is critical during this first year. The teacher may use newsletters, notes and telephone calls to share information with parents. Parents can also share their children's concerns and let the teacher know of any changes at home that might affect a child's behaviour and progress in Kindergarten. Informal discussions between the parent and the teacher will keep both informed of the child's progress and development. Parents and teachers working together will help to ensure a successful Kindergarten experience for children.

Most Kindergarten programs have a parent committee called a Local Advisory Committee (LAC), and privately operated kindergartens maintain a governing board. Parents may wish to serve in a formal position or in a supporting role. All schools now have a school council, and the LAC, or governing board of a private operator, may be directly involved in this council.

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It is often a good idea for parents to get to know each other and build a social network. Children in the Kindergarten class may continue to go to school together. Parents who meet in the Kindergarten room could end up sitting together at the Grade 12 graduation banquet table!

In a Catholic school, it is recognized that parents are the primary educators of the child in their faith. Parents are encouraged to participate actively as part of the home–school–parish team. The example parents show their children through such activities as prayer, scripture reading and discussion about their religious experiences at school, will be critically important to supporting the spiritual growth of the children.

At school

Each teacher invites parents to get involved in ways that are appropriate for individual parents, the community, and the interests and needs of the class. Some Kindergarten programs have scheduled helper days. Others encourage more informal, drop-in visits. The following list provides some examples of typical parent roles in the Kindergarten classroom.

- Talking to the children.
- Assisting at a learning centre.
- Helping with snacks.
- Writing down stories that children dictate.
- Reading to children.
- Supervising simple games.
- Obtaining, preparing or cleaning materials.
- Sharing personal expertise with the children.
- Organizing and supervising the classroom library.
- Assisting with computer activities.
- Listening as children read.
- Mixing paints and cutting paper for art projects.
- Assisting children with their clothing.
- Assisting with field trips.
- Assisting with such clerical duties as typing, filing, sorting, photocopying.
- Preparing bulletin board displays.
- Preparing charts, posters, booklets.

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At home

These are just a few of the ways in which parents may support their child's Kindergarten experience through at-home activities.

- Reading stories aloud at bedtime.
- Helping the child to print his or her name.
- Being a reader and a writer, in order to provide a role model for the children.
- Using good speech, as a model for children's language skills.
- Celebrating and encouraging children's early attempts to communicate through writing and reading.
- Listening to children and encouraging them to talk about everyday activities.
- Encouraging children to make decisions by offering choices.
- Encouraging children to take responsibility for some tasks.
- Encouraging children to solve everyday problems.
- Ensuring plenty of rest, with early bedtimes.
- Ensuring that children eat a variety of nutritious foods from all the food groups.
- Providing opportunities for children to practise buttoning, doing zippers, drawing, cutting, tying shoelaces and doing puzzles.
- Providing opportunities for children to walk, stretch, hop, jump, run, dance or skip, both indoors and outdoors.
- Encouraging children to listen to a variety of music.
- Displaying the children's schoolwork at home.

Parents can also include their children in everyday activities:

- baking—have the child help to measure ingredients
- walking—encourage the child to observe the world and to develop an active lifestyle
- shopping—point out the names of stores, gas stations, businesses, restaurants and schools; notice traffic signs
- gardening—give the child a small section to plant and care for
- writing—include a note from the child in letters to family; have the child write telephone messages and lists
- cleaning and tidying up—help the child sort toys into categories: cars, blocks, dishes, puzzles.

Young children need lots of practice and patient encouragement in their learning. Working together is just as important as completing the task.

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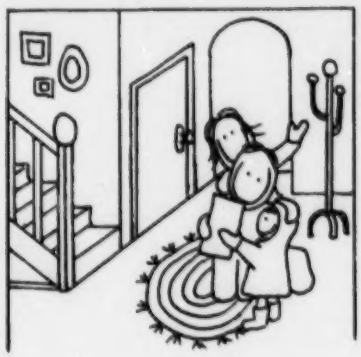
After the Kindergarten day

Each new experience adds to a child's knowledge, and when the child shares an experience with an adult, there is great potential for reinforcing the learning. Parents are in the best position to help children make connections between past experiences and current ones.

Talking with children about their experiences in Kindergarten sounds easier than it is! The question, "What did you learn in school today?" often receives the response, "Nothing. All we did was play!"

These are some alternative questions that might help your child share more specific information with you.

- How did you make that?
- What are you learning about now?
- What learning centres did you go to today?
- What was in the sand table today?
- Can you tell me about the story you heard today?
- Where did you play today?
- Who did you play with today?



Parent resources

Many Kindergarten programs have resources available for parents on a variety of topics, such as child development, discipline, parenting, health issues and community programs. Or, the Kindergarten teacher and/or school principal may suggest other places to look for information, such as libraries, local agencies or government offices.

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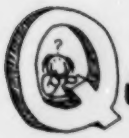
In a Catholic school, parents may wish to inquire about resources for encouraging the spiritual development of their child. The local parish is another good source of information.



uestions parents may want to ask the teacher

The information that Kindergarten programs provide to parents during registration will likely answer questions about hours of operation, school telephone numbers, vacation dates, emergency procedures, field trips and transportation, as well as explaining the Kindergarten program and daily routines. Other questions parents may want to ask include:

- Does the program run for the full year?
- Will there be extra costs for special activities or field trips?
- How many children will be in the classroom?
- When can I stay with my child?
- How can I help my child at home?
- Do the children go outside for recess?
- Does the Kindergarten class mix with children in other grades?
- What are the rules for the classroom, school and playground?
- How do you handle discipline in the classroom and playground?
- How do you resolve conflicts between children?
- How do the children solve problems?
- How do you help children solve problems?
- My child seems different from the others—shy, rambunctious, younger, older, sickly, allergic, asthmatic, doesn't talk much, talks all the time. How will he/she fit in?
- How can parents be involved? What is the role of the Local Advisory Committee or governing board?
- How many teachers are on supervision at one time?

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- What are the times when teachers supervise?
- How many children attend the school? At what grade levels?
- Are there different school entrances for different grade levels?
- What are the orientation and start-up procedures?
- What is the reporting method used?
- When are report cards and conferences scheduled?
- How will my child's learning be assessed during the year?
- How is the snack/lunch program organized? My child has allergies to . . .
- Does my child need to bring any supplies for the year?
- Will photos be taken during the year? Will I be able to get copies?
- Where is the outdoor play area?
- Do the children have regular access to a gymnasium and equipment?
- What services are available to the school; for example, health, such as speech, dental, immunization; social and family support agencies; recreational and cultural associations?
- Does this school offer francophone, French immersion or second language programs? Would they be appropriate for my child?

In a Catholic school, parents may wish to ask:

- How will you nurture my child's faith development?
- What is your school's relationship with the local parish?
- Is there a prayer centre in the Kindergarten classroom?
- What religious education program is used in the school?
- What steps are taken to encourage faith values across the curriculum?

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